

EU/US

A new President will ask more of Europe

By Brian Beary in Washington

As Obama-mania swept up Europe this week with the US Senator's much-hyped visit to Germany, France and the United Kingdom, there are growing signs the next US administration will urge Europe to beef up its role on the global stage. Speaking in Berlin on 24 July, Obama stressed how "the burdens of global citizenship continue to bind us together" and added that «Americans and Europeans alike will be required to do more – not less.» Even if his rival John McCain clinches victory in November, the days of uneasy silence between the EU and US on divisive issues like Iraq and Guantanamo Bay look set to pass.

"President Bush has been afraid to ask for help in Iraq and Afghanistan because he knows European leaders can easily say no without losing much political capital," says Dan Hamilton, Director of the Centre for Transatlantic Relations at Johns Hopkins University in Washington. «McCain and Obama will be different. They will demand that Germany contribute more in Afghanistan and Europe help out more in Iraq by accepting refugees, providing humanitarian aid and developing the Iraqi economy," he adds. Obama hinted at this in Berlin, saying of Afghanistan, "my country and yours have a stake in seeing that NATO's first mission beyond Europe's borders is a success... America cannot do this alone". Neither candidate will care much about whether this help comes under an EU or NATO banner, argues Hamilton. "The debate over architectural stuff seems silly in the US. NATO needs the EU's help. We will be the biggest fans of EU missions," he says.

BRUSSELS SNUB UNWISE?

The question is how Europe will respond to such overtures. Steve Clemons, Director at the New America think-tank in Washington, predicted the response would not be overwhelming. "There is much less trust in Europe of the US than before. Once the hype about Obama dies down, Europeans will start to ask what he can do for them," Clemons warns. "Neither Obama nor McCain has shown consistent interest in Europe. Neither

sees it as anything more than an assist player for other world challenges."

In Obama's Euro-capital blitz (Berlin, Paris, London), Brussels was left out. One EU official told *Europolitics* they saw this as a missed opportunity. "He could have shown himself understanding how the EU has



"The burdens of global citizenship continue to bind us together"

become a force, rather than just following the old path of bilateral ties," the official said. A view echoed by Clemons: "the EU is becoming a driver in global affairs. I think Obama made a mistake in not going to Brussels – one that McCain, who has been to Europe much more often, would not have made."

Yet a Congressional staffer in the Obama camp said the omission did not imply disregard for the EU but a present preoccupation with winning over US voters. "The US public knows nothing about the EU," he said. A photo next to EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso would leave the US public cold whereas shots next to French President Nicolas Sarkozy or German Chancellor Angela Merkel – better-known figures in the US – help him claim foreign policy gravitas. Obama's choice of Berlin for his speech augured well for EU-US relations, argues Hamilton. "Berlin, not Brussels, symbolises the possibilities and challenges of Europe's unity. When Obama spoke there, he was speaking to Europe, not Germany," he says.

NEW DYNAMICS IN EU-US RELATIONS

Looking to 2009, the dynamics of the EU-US-Iran diplomatic triangle will change if Obama becomes President. Whereas the Bush administration let the EU mediate between Washington and Tehran, Obama will deal directly with Iran. Similarly, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Obama has vowed to be more personally engaged than Bush, although little change in the substance of US policy can be expected from either candidate (like the EU, they will push for a negotiated

two-state solution).

A longstanding source of tension, the US terror suspect detention centre in Guantanamo Bay, may finally disappear. "Obama will dispense with Guantanamo more rapidly than McCain whose team will be divided," says Steve Clemons. As for President Bush's plan to install a missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic, Hamilton predicts that "McCain will push to continue the project, Obama will try to delay it". On climate change, the horizon looks brighter as both favour introducing mandatory US-wide cuts in greenhouse gas emissions – something the EU has called for. This may smooth the path for an agreement in Copenhagen in December 2009 on a post-Kyoto treaty. However, the next President will face domestic pressures not to sign up to anything that does not bind China and India to cut their emissions.

Both Obama and McCain will probably continue the Bush policy of expanding the US Visa Waiver Programme to include all EU member states and will push for Turkey and the Balkan nations to join the EU. On trade, a key question will be how much effort will either put into the Transatlantic Economic Council, the inter-governmental body set up in May 2007 to get rid of non-tariff barriers. Even if the President is a free trader, the powerful role US Congress plays in setting policy could spell trouble for the EU – especially if the more protectionist Democrats retain their majority in November's elections. ■

Europeans prefer Obama

A recent Pew Global Attitudes poll found that 84% of French, 82% of Germans, 74% of Britons and 72% of Spanish had confidence in Senator Obama, far eclipsing Senator McCain, whose confidence rating was 33% in France and Germany, 37% in Poland and 44% in the UK. European support for President Bush remained dismal, with 87% of French, 85% of Germans and 81% of Britons having no confidence in him. For full results, see <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/260.pdf>